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President's Voice

By Wayne Stinnett



A lot has happened in this past year. Book sales have been all over the map: astronomical highs, and unfortunately, abysmal lows. It has affected many of us, some more than others. Wouldn't it be cool if we could predict the reading habits of the public at large? I don't know about y'all, but I'd like to flat-line that sales graph at a comfortable rate. Yeah, the highs are great, but the lows can hurt.

Those lows are one of the reasons our board of directors created the Linda Kay West Conference Scholarship Fund. Every year, the board can give up to three conference registration scholarships to members who are riding in the trough of that undulating wave, to help cover the cost of registering for the conference. We want you there.

To apply for one of these scholarships, just send an email to the Central Coordinator at admin@ninc.com. Only you and the CC will know your name; the board doesn't discuss who or what the reason was you applied, so everything is confidential between the two of you.

You must have been a member in good standing for a full year before applying for the scholarship, and you can only receive this conference scholarship once. It's completely funded by the donations of our members. Records are kept of who has received a scholarship in the past and if more than three applications are made, the CC chooses three at random, and then notifies each applicant on June 15th of each year. If your name's not selected, you can apply again for a future conference.

I hope to see all y'all on the beach. Yeah, that's proper Southernese grammar.

Wayne

NINC Member Benefits

Don't forget to sign up for the [email loop](#), [critique/brainstorming group](#), and the members-only [Facebook group](#) if you haven't already. The Pro Services Directory, member [discount page](#), and [sample letters](#) are also great resources.

Missing a newsletter? Past issues can be found [here](#). You can also [propose an article](#) or submit a [letter to the editor](#).

Accessing the NINC Website

Not sure how to log in to the NINC website? Visit the login page here: <https://ninc.com/membership-overview/login-to-ninc/>

Wayne Stinnett writes your typical murder and mayhem in paradise. His characters and plots come from real people and situations he's encountered, fictionalized to protect the guilty.

Selling Lies for Fun & Profit

Getting in on the action of selling your own books online

By Patricia Burroughs



The question, “How do I create an online bookstore?” results in an overwhelming array of responses. However, selling books online breaks down into three components:

1. Display books with their descriptions, prices, awards, review quotes, etc.
2. Accept payment for books.
3. Deliver books.



Creating a store has many viable options that range from “one app does all” to mixing and matching your own combination of services. The good news is that there may be no single ‘best’ choice for you, or even one right or wrong choice where wrong leads to disaster—almost all ecommerce options offer free trials. Some even have basic accounts that are forever free. Don’t be afraid to test-drive several.

Your visual store

To create a store, the most time-consuming task will be data entry—especially if you have a lot of books.

Authors with experience uploading books to vendors will find listing them on their own ecommerce site to be more streamlined. Generally, you’ll have a template (possibly several to choose from) where you’ll upload the cover and the epub, mobi, and/or PDF files. You’ll fill in the title and price, and you’ll control how much description and detail you want according to how you envision your bookstore’s layout and your readers’ experience (or how much time you want to invest). You can go with streamlined, classic, simple, or a fully branded look that is an extension of your website’s theme, or anything in between.

Getting paid

In most cases you will choose your payment preference, even if you use a “one stop does all” system. Pay gateways include but aren’t limited to:

- PayPal, which also collects sales tax (but does not pay it for you). PayPal does not collect VAT. Customers pay via their PayPal account, bank account, or credit card through the PayPal portal.
- Payhip is another gateway where customers can pay via bank account or credit card, and Payhip handles VAT for you.
- Selz, Square, and Stripe all seem to collect sales tax and VAT but pass the funds and details on to you to handle.

Obviously you’ll want to decide which options you prefer. This [WooCommerce](#) page explains payment gateways and has a two-minute video that is also helpful, whether you use the WooCommerce [plugin](#) or not. [BookFunnel](#) also has a helpful breakdown of the five payment options it supports that even compare how much money you—the author—will get with each one.

Delivering the download or shipment

If you are going to be selling ebooks, you need a delivery system. Sometimes the place to download will be hosted on your own site, which may be a component of the offsite option you’ve chosen. Or you might end up linking to a specific source for downloads. With print books, you’ll need to decide whether to ship yourself, drop ship, or set up another process.

SSL Certificates

If you are going to sell directly from your site, you absolutely need to have an SSL Certificate. That your site is secure is indicated by the “s” in the **https://**, meaning buyers know the identity of the website has been authenticated and information sent to the server will be secure and encrypted. Google gives a ranking boost to sites with SSL.

K.I.S.S.

In the realm of *keeping it simple, scribe*—The simplest approach is to list books on your own site and link to your pay gateway of choice. For example, [ML Banner](#) sells signed books by linking directly to PayPal and handling everything from paying sales tax to shipping. If you sell digital, you’ll have to add a download option, but it can still be that simple.

In addition to his full-fledged online bookstore that uses WooCommerce, Wayne Stinnett’s page, [Jesse’s Library](#), has books that might be found on his character Jesse’s boat, Gaspar’s Revenge, with links to Amazon. Whether you have a handful of books or a hundred, this option may seem easiest and most practical for you.

One service/plugin does all options

[MyBookTable](#) is a robust WordPress plugin that allows you to link your books to bookstores around the world. This is not the option to use if your goal is to increase your earnings by selling direct, but it offers nice options if you want to integrate your site with up to 36 bookstores, Goodreads, and more. It creates “a great-looking bookstore on your website with maximum control and minimum hassle.” There are three options: free, or a one-time price of \$49, or \$99 for more flexibility, analytics and customizing.

[Aerio](#) is an option provided by Ingram Spark. If you have your books set up with Ingram Spark you can set up a free Aerio online bookstore and you don’t even need your own website. Not only can you sell your own books—ebook or print—but you can sell any books in Aerio’s catalog, as well. Your Aerio store buys the book from Ingram Book Company at the wholesale price and you resell with the remaining margin. Since you are also the publisher, you’ll be getting money from both ends—publishing and selling.

You can even add books by other people that fit your brand, or books you enjoy and recommend to others. You may already do this as a store affiliate with Amazon or BN, etc., but with Aerio you’ll earn more per sale. Aerio provides a number of interesting marketing assets, like customizable widgets and previews for your blog and website, and also ways to sell on social media.

[Shopify](#) is another option where you don’t need a website to set up an online store. It’s a cloud-based, fully hosted site that charges a monthly fee. In return, it provides the website, templates for designing your store and setting up your books. It takes payments and delivers downloads. Your account can be set up to collect taxes and VAT—funds and information they will turn over to you to file yourself. Many authors feel that the ease of Shopify is worth the monthly fee.

[WooCommerce](#) is a one-stop-does-all option with a store owned by you and hosted on your website. This open-source, free plugin is the most popular ecommerce plugin for WordPress sites that sell direct. With this plugin you can set up your store, take payments and deliver the downloads. WooCommerce provides interfaces to 80 pay gateways, including PayPal, Square, and Payhip. With WooCommerce software, your reader will be able to view, buy, and download ebooks directly from your site.

Mixing and matching

[Gumroad](#) is part of an extremely popular “hybrid” option for those wanting to host their own store but not deal with taking money and delivery. You create your own store/display and have total control of how it looks and integrates into your brand, and you link your products to Gumroad so it finishes the sales/delivery. You also create simple book pages on Gumroad with cover image, description, etc., and upload files there. Readers can then buy and download books and you won’t have to handle any support. Gumroad handles the money, and they even collect and pay the sales taxes and even VAT. [Grace Burrowes’s](#) online store uses Gumroad for preorders before switching to BookFunnel once the book is out. [Patricia Rice](#) uses Gumroad to offer her newsletter readers and Facebook fans special opportunities, deals and bundles.

[BookFunnel](#) has expanded its scope so that you can sell through your own website. It supports five sales methods—Payhip, Selz, Shopify, WooCommerce & PayPal. The site gives concise explanations of required payment, tech knowledge, along with each book’s pricing, plus pros and cons to help authors determine which best suits their needs. BookFunnel also provides support for customers who don’t know how to sideload books. Epub & mobi files are watermarked with the buyer’s email address. Sales downloads are counted like regular downloads, meaning these are tallied as part of your monthly quota.

[Ecwid](#) is another cloud-based platform: “As simple as adding a YouTube video.” Not only can you add a shopping cart to your WordPress site, but ECWID makes it easy to open a Facebook store, sell on Instagram, and add ecommerce to Wix, Joomla, Weebly, or other non WordPress sites. Great documentation, too.

“How many books do I need to have before I host my own store?”

If you aren’t certain whether you have enough books to make selling from your website worthwhile, consider that, by offering your readers incentives, extras, or lower prices than they get elsewhere, you can earn more per book. Even if you have a handful that sell from time to time, it’s never a bad thing. Author web stores can give an image of a career with more gravitas and can be part of branding and image. If you’re one of the writers who encourages your readers to use sites other than Amazon, why not get them in the habit of using yours?

If you have so many books that you are overwhelmed at the thought of building a store, break tasks into chunks: series, by genre, or some other definition. By adding a few at a time, you have the opportunity to promote each new batch with your newsletter. By offering incentives, special prices, extras, you may get a lot more traffic and attention than had you done it all at one time.

Perhaps the most promising and reassuring thing to take from this is to know each author who shared their setup was happy. Take your time, don't stress, and you'll know when you have found that perfect fit for you.

*Pooks (a.k.a. [Patricia Burroughs](#)) loves Pratchett, Aaronovitch, Dunnett, and Heyer. She's a novelist, screenwriter, and occasional short story writer. She is also an Academy Fellow, having received the Academy Nicholl Fellowship in Screenwriting (awarded by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences). She is currently completing *The Fury Triad*, the award-winning YA romantic fantasy series. Her most recent publication, *Revenge of the Killer Flamingos*, is an #ownvoices funny cozy mystery about a female sleuth with ADHD, Dyscalculia, and associated cognitive disorders.*

Customer Relationship Management for Authors

By Nicole Evelina



I'm lucky my day job is in marketing because it's taught me a lot I can translate into my author life. One trend that perplexed me for a while was Customer Relationship Management (CRM), but I finally figured out how authors can use it. In the corporate world, CRM serves two primary functions:

1. Shepherd a customer through the decision-making process from first contact through sale and into brand loyalty and future patronage.
2. Gather information on the customer for targeted marketing and personalized customer service.

The second is actually the easiest to address, so we'll talk about it first.

Personalized Service

Companies have CRM software allowing employees to store special profile information and personal preferences on clients for future reference. Most of this information is demographic and used in targeted advertising. To a certain extent, authors can do this through Facebook and AMS ads that allow us to get specific in our audiences for ads or email clients that allow us to deliver messages to segments of our overall readership. But the true purpose of CRM is much more; it's all about personalized customer service.

A speaker I heard gave an example that made this aspect of CRM crystal clear. After a long flight that had involved many delays, she checked into a fancy hotel she had visited before. She was thinking about how she wanted nothing more than to relax with a certain type of beer. Unfortunately, the bar was closed for the night, meaning she was out of luck. But when she got into her room, she found a six-pack of that beer chilled and waiting for her. She called down to the front desk and asked how they could have possibly known, since she didn't say anything. It

turns out that, on her previous visit, she had mentioned to the bartender this was her favorite and he noted it in her record. Having it waiting for her on her next visit was part of their customer service.

Now, while most of us can't afford to go that far for our fans (and if you can, I want to learn from you), nor do we have or need fancy databases. We can personalize our fan interactions. I know one author who mails a tiny purse/keychain charm to every person who signs up for her street team, along with a personalized note. Others collect birthdays and send their fans birthday cards. Even if you can't or don't want to do that, try keeping a list of who has responded best to each book and keep them in mind when you find similar books or relevant articles. You can ask a question in your newsletter and keep a list of how people respond. Recommending others is a great way to not only support your fellow authors, but it also shows you're not just in this for yourself. Any way you can let your fans know you remember them can go a long way in building a relationship, because you've taken an interest in them, not just asked something of them.

Drip Marketing

Think of your relationship with a reader like a winding country road. Your drip marketing (number one in the list above) is the sheepdog that herds your readers toward a sale, and then hopefully, guards them well until they choose to buy from you again.

Because we live in the electronic age, most of this is done online through our newsletter software (although some companies use phone calls or texts as well). Drip marketing comes from the idea that you slowly make your way into a customer's (or reader's) consciousness through a subtle drip of information. That information comes through a series of automatic emails that are persistent like a dripping faucet. Other synonymous terms include drip campaigns, automated email campaigns, lifecycle emails, autoresponders, and/or marketing automation.

You've seen these emails whether you realize it or not; pretty much every company out there employs this method the moment you give them your email address, whether it is to download something, join a mailing list, or purchase a product. That's when you become a sales lead. The emails that follow are intended to nurture you from someone who is just aware of the company into someone who is interested in it, and then someone who takes action (i.e., buys the product). Sometimes it works well, while sometimes it just makes you unsubscribe. The key is to provide value. If your emails are all "buy my book, buy my book," all you will do is drive people away. I suggest not doing any selling in these emails. That can come later when they've gotten to know you.

Nick Stephenson, author of *Reader Magnets*, calls this your reader funnel because you are subtly drawing them into a more intimate relationship. Depending on your purpose, he recommends a drip sequence of anywhere from six to 12 emails with multiple giveaways and a contest. I don't personally have that much to give away, and I don't want to be bothered that much by anyone, so mine is only three emails, but do what you will. The company I work for typically stays around five or six.

What might a drip email sequence look like? Here is a sample of how I run mine:

1. When a person subscribes to your newsletter, they should immediately receive some kind of welcome message thanking them for subscribing and reminding them how often they will hear from you. You may also want to include a question for them to answer, which encourages interaction (though very few people will likely respond).
2. Some people include their free reader magnet (a short story, a book, or giveaway of some other kind) with the initial email, while others wait and send it a few days or hours later in another email. To me it makes sense to send it immediately if you promised them free content for signing up.
3. A few days later—maybe about three or four—you should send another email. The content is up to you, but it is often recommended that this one is more personal so your new reader can get to know you as the person behind the author. I give my readers a few paragraphs about why I write in my chosen genres and invite them to connect with me via social media and/or email. You should also remind them about their free gift and send them another link to it in case they lost your first email.
4. You can throw more emails into the mix after this, but if you do, space them out. I personally prefer to leave people alone for a while after two or three emails. I suggest reading Stephenson's book if you want to do an expanded campaign.
5. It's not until 20 days after they sign up that I check in again to let them know I have a street team and encourage them to sign up.

For a street team, your sequence could be as simple as a welcome email, followed by one a few days later that gives them tips on how they can help you as an author and what they can expect from you. You already have their loyalty, so not much more is needed than that.

Pro tip

You may want to go into your email provider every so often and make sure your drip is still functioning. I found out when writing this article that mine had been paused for like a year (no idea why) without me knowing it!

Drip marketing can get much more complex—such as resending emails or sending new ones to people who didn't open previous emails or those who abandoned a shopping cart—but this article covers the basics.

Nicole Evelina is a historical fiction, non-fiction, and women's fiction author whose six books have won three Book of the Year designations. Her fiction tells the stories of strong women from history and today, focusing on biographical historical fiction, while her non-fiction focuses on women's history, specifically little-known figures.

Tactical Crowdfunding

Using Kickstarter for quick capital

By M.C.A. Hogarth



Most people know about Kickstarter, the website where creators crowdfund their projects to the tune of thousands of dollars, and for the most part we've heard about the outrageous successes (and the devastating failures). These stories paint Kickstarter as a "go big or go home" platform, which obscures one of its most useful functions: arranging for small infusions of capital, quickly. Would it be nice for us to swing one of those \$100,000 campaigns? Sure, but who has the time to manage several thousand backers' products? We're too busy writing. But that doesn't mean you need to pay for the small-to-medium expenses of your career on your own.

What kind of things am I talking about?

- Putting your backlist in print again (or in ebook for the first time).
- Getting a new cover designed for some of your backlist works.
- Buying audio editions of your work.
- Writing that niche novella you can't justify otherwise.
- Getting fun merchandise done for in-person events.

Most of us have some loose ends we'd like to tie up. Why not enlist your fans' help? You can do it with the right *kind* of Kickstarter campaign.

Think small

First, ask for the least amount of money you can get away with. The formula is this: Amount I Need to Buy the Thing I'm Raising For + Amount I Need to Fulfill Prizes + 20 percent of that total for fees and taxes + another 20 percent for profit. (You need to pay yourself.)

Your total goal should be under \$2,000; if it's not, you're out of the 'quick and dirty' Kickstarter range and into the 'I need to take this a lot more seriously' department. If your goal can't be achieved in under \$2,000, then you have three choices: (1) pick something else that does come in under that goal; (2) run the project intending to fulfill only some of your expenses, and (3) pay the rest out of your pocket; or retool to run a major campaign. (Which I don't recommend. Write another book instead.)

The best way to keep things small is to limit your prizes and your tiers—that minimizes your mental overhead when it's time to figure out who gets what. Most of your prizes should be virtual and cheap to deliver: wallpapers, ebooks, emailed cut scenes, cameos, names listed in the backs of the books, etc. Get creative; anything you can do once and reproduce infinitely is good! Are you good at singing? Send an MP3! Like talking to people on camera? Give them a backer-only video. Reserve physical prizes for very high tiers, and limit their numbers. Don't get trapped into shipping several hundred hardcovers; have one tier for 10 autographed books and charge more for them.

Don't feel bad about fewer tiers. Tell your backers that you're streamlining so that everyone gets what they backed for as quickly as possible. So many Kickstarter projects never send their awards that if you do so consistently, you will be lauded for it.

Think quick

Don't let these campaigns drag on. A well-run campaign needs daily attention, plus you're going to be burning time fulfilling prizes. One to two weeks is good; generally the more money you're asking—the longer you need. But there's a point of diminishing returns: it's hard to sustain backer excitement over three or four weeks, so don't try.

The moment you hit your goal (and it might be fast!), start to work on those prizes so you can get them out the door as quickly as possible. You don't want your responsibility to your campaign to linger any longer than necessary.

Think minimalist

One of Kickstarter's features is the ability to offer stretch goals: additional prizes that get "unlocked" when the campaign hits a certain goal over and above the one needed for a successful campaign. These stretch goals give backers a reason to keep throwing money at the project. Usually creators promise things like more merchandise, extra gifts, another story—the possibilities are endless. Which is exactly why you shouldn't declare too many. Stretch goals are a good way to overextend yourself. Pick one or two that won't take much time or effort and don't be tempted to add more as your totals go up. You're not aiming for "most money possible" because that usually entails "most effort possible." You're aiming for "most money possible for the least amount of effort, so I can stay focused on my core business. Which is writing. Not fulfilling Kickstarter prizes."

I usually pick one or two stretch goals, and tie them into something I want to do anyway, and can resell later, like cut scenes or bonus short fiction I can bundle later into a collection for retail.

I didn't fund!

There are a lot of reasons a Kickstarter might not fund, but most of them boil down to “my goal didn't match up with my audience.” (It's a lot like writing a successful novel that way.) But here are the most common problems:

- **You didn't tell your fans.** They can't fund your project if they don't know about it, and you should give them some advance warning so they can plan their budgets. (I usually tell mine a month in advance, and hit up all my major social media/newsletter/chat outlets before and during the campaign.)
- **You didn't keep the project alive.** You should plan to post an update to your project every day it's active, and then regularly after closing, especially until you're done sending out prizes. Don't just talk about the campaign's progress; have a list of topics related to your project. If it's a book, you can talk about how you came up with the characters, or share photographs of the place the book's set, or discuss forensics—whatever seems relevant. If it's a side project, like merchandise, you can talk about the process of hiring artists, or what your vision was, or ask fans for suggestions on how to use the results. (Asking your fans things in these posts is a great way to promote engagement.)
- **You asked for too much money in too little time for the number of fans you have.** Keep in mind 95 percent of your money's going to come from your existing fanbase, not from people “discovering” you on Kickstarter: the amount you can raise is going to be limited by that number. If you have one hundred fans, don't ask them for \$2,000, ask for \$250. Likewise, don't ask people for \$2,000 in five days (unless you have several thousand fans). The amount you can raise and the time you can do it in are directly related to how many people you can mobilize, so use that to set your expectations.
- **Something about your prizes wasn't compelling.** Best way to fix this problem is to ask your fans what they want—and what they find uninteresting. Mine keep telling me they love bookmarks, for instance, and aren't very interested in patches, so I keep producing bookmarks!

It may take you a few tries to get the formula down. Don't be discouraged if you don't figure it out immediately. Use Kickstarter's search engine to find other (successfully funded) writer projects and see how they handled it. (Here's my profile if you want to see mine: <https://www.kickstarter.com/profile/mcahogarth/created>). Take notes. Listen to your fans, too; they'll tell you what they're willing to pay for, and how often. They want to help you! So let them!

Do it again

Did it work? Excellent. Do it again. One of the side effects of a good Kickstarter campaign is that it gives your fans something fun to get worked up about. They like helping you accomplish something; they enjoy watching the totals rise and unlocking your one or two stretch goals.

Don't let this tool rust now that you've mastered it ... any time you've got a small project that could use some capital, use Kickstarter for a quick injection. Have fun with it!

M.C.A. Hogarth is a former vice president of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, and the author of over 40 novels in the genres of fantasy, science fiction, and romance. She is also a professional visual artist, doodles cartoon jaguars for fun, and has written a book about Kickstarter.

13 Reasons Why Authors *Need* an INC (or LLC) *Now!*

By Michael L. Banner



If you had a baby, you would nurture that baby, making sure that he was strong and able to take care of himself. Then at some point, you would send him off on his own, to be his own person, ready to take on the world.

Your self-publishing business is a lot like this. The big difference—I am recommending that you kick your baby out of the house *now*, long before it has even come close to reaching maturity!

You might ask, “What the heck is he talking about?”

Whether purely self-publishing or hybrid, your publishing business is your “baby” and you may have heard “experts” say that you should incorporate (form a corporation or an LLC on behalf of) your business, but only *after* it has “grown up” (i.e., “matured to adulthood”). The belief being that you don’t need the protections of forming an entity, until after your business has achieved profitability.

I am suggesting, with few exceptions, that you not wait until later; that you form your business entity *now*.

No matter when you do it, there are many strong reasons why forming an entity is smart for your publishing business:

Tax savings

With the addition of the new 20 percent Pass-Through Deduction, setting up an entity almost becomes an absolute necessity for authors. The details are truly complicated and best left for your CPA/accountant to untangle. Yet, even without these new hugely positive changes, a Corporation or LLC enjoys many more tax benefits over a Sole Proprietorship.

Your publisher image

Your image as a self-publisher starts with your publisher name. Which one looks better: *Banner Books* or *Banner Books, LLC*? Your publisher's name shows up on each book description. This "image" extends out to your website, FB page, etc. When you are self-publishing and your business is incorporated, it imbues professionalism. In fact, if you take some other steps, your publishing business will look no different, and perhaps even better than most traditional imprints. In short, if you're serious about setting up a lasting publishing business, you will want to form a business entity.

Partnerships

If your publishing business has two partners (i.e., husband and wife) or more, an entity makes everything simpler: vendors, publishing platforms, bookstores, etc., are dealing with one legal entity rather than two individuals.

Transferability

If by some chance you wish to sell your publishing business, this would be much easier if your publishing assets (i.e., your catalog of titles, ISBN's, brands, etc.) are controlled by one business entity.

Liability protection

This might not seem like an important issue, after all, what can we as authors hurt except other people's feelings? But liability can come in many forms: charges of copyright or trademark infringement, or perhaps something in the commentary you wrote for your book may be considered malicious and/or libelous, and so much more. By setting up an entity to own and operate your publishing business, you are protecting your *personal* assets by separating them from your *publishing* business assets.

In addition to these benefits, reasons for incorporating right away include:

Your corporate history

Your corporate history starts only the day after you have incorporated (or formed an LLC). Unfortunately, some banks, credit issuing vendors, merchants, and others may look down upon your publishing company if it has not been around very long. So why wait? Get incorporated now, and later when your company is very profitable, your corporate history will shine.

Future changes harder to make

Imagine that you have already set up your publishing accounts, your books on each platform, and even your books' ISBNs all in your name (not to mention copyrights, trademarks, etc.). Then years later (when the "experts" say you should), you form your publishing entity.

Now you must change everything into your publishing entity's name (and unique identifier). It is so much easier to do it right the first time.

Defeat SoleProp-ism

I made this "ism" up. Yet you have probably experienced this: banks, vendors, review blogs, and so many others often look negatively upon Sole-Prop (Sole Proprietor) self-published authors. This is rarely the case with a corporate publisher (i.e., You Publishing, LLC) which of course has signed you on as its primary author.

Instant credibility

We have already established that your image as a publisher is all-important. Taking your publishing company's credibility seriously should not start after your business has achieved profitability; it starts immediately.

Unexpected liability

Maybe a character in one of your books is exactly like a real person, or you have included an actual person's name, or you have inadvertently used someone else's brand or mark in your work. The point being, you may not know what you have done, until long after you have done it, when someone sues for liability. To create your business entity then is too late; it needs to occur before the liability.

Unexpected death/disability

It is too late to try and get something done after you have died or become disabled. With a business entity, especially an LLC, you can easily set up your agreements to give your heirs membership (ownership) in your LLC, *before* your death. Do it now, while you can.

In addition to your main publishing business, which you can see needs the protection of a business entity, you may *also* find the need for a separate entity (or two) at some point as well. Here are two examples:

Co-author partnership

Say you want to write a new series with another author, or set up a multi-author boxed set, or even co-write just one book with someone else. One of the easiest ways to control and own this type of limited project is to form an LLC and have the LLC own and operate the project. It is easy to set up each of the participants as a member/owner of the LLC, with an equal percentage of ownership/profits (or whatever you agree upon). This LLC would be separate from your own publishing company.

Segment your liability

Say you want to write a book or series of books, on a topic you think might cause some public blowback or even liability. For instance, what if your book shines a very unfavorable

light on a particular religion, specific town, private corporation, or political figure? To shield yourself from further liability, and to prevent your other valuable business assets from being hurt by this special project, form a separate LLC to own and run this project. Again, this LLC would be separate from your own publishing company.

Naturally, there are many variables to consider when creating an entity that will own and operate your publishing business, such as the state in which you are located, the costs for setup and maintenance, your personal tax situation, and much more.

The reasons for forming a business entity and doing so *now* are substantial.

Michael Banner has authored 10 sci-fi novels (penned as M.L. Banner), which have sold over 100,000 copies in his short five years of writing. He has won awards, still manages his catalog, and continues to write more books, with four planned for release—in addition to a non-fiction book called *Self-Publishing Empire*[™]—this year. Michael writes books because he absolutely loves it, but he also enjoys the business side of self-publishing. Michael is what is called a serial entrepreneur (someone who regularly starts new businesses) and relishes helping small biz owners so much that he sits on boards of other start-ups and has consulted thousands of small biz owners over the years on how to set up their own enterprises and manage their business affairs. This led him to create [SmallBiZ.com, Inc.](http://SmallBiZ.com), a business filing services company that helps others start their own small businesses. Now over 19 years old, it has formed, filed, and assisted with over 100,000 small business corporations or LLCs.

New NINC Discount

Need one more reason to do an LLC?

NINC members can use a professional filing service to set up a new entity for **free**: you pay only the state fees and a shipping & handling fee.

As the founder of the filing services company [SmallBiZ.com, Inc.](#), Michael Banner has authorized such a discount, only for us, his fellow NINC members. Additionally, he says, “SmallBiZ.com’s talented staff welcomes your calls to answer questions you may have about completing a business filing for your own specific situation. Or, feel free to anonymously peruse its highly informative, easy-to-use website before engaging them.”

For more formation about this special discount, check out the NINC [Discount page](#).

In Their Own Voices: Part One

The importance of fiction written by authors with marginalized identities

By Trish Milburn



Chances are you've heard of the #ownvoices movement, likely through a hashtag on Twitter. This series of articles will examine how #ownvoices came about, why it matters, and what it means to you as an author, whether you belong to a marginalized community or not.

Origin

In Sept. 2015, Corinne Duyvis, author of middle grade and young adult sci-fi and fantasy novels, first posted on Twitter using #ownvoices when asking for recommendations of kid lit about diverse characters written by authors from those same diverse groups. Although her original tweet spawned the movement, Duyvis has said she wants that to be the extent of her involvement; she doesn't moderate or regulate what can be claimed as #ownvoices—literally writing what you know.

Duyvis did suggest if authors are going to claim their work as #ownvoices, then it's wise to be specific. Claiming a single shared identity with a character doesn't mean the author shares all marginalized aspects. For instance, the author might be Native American but the character might be both Native American and gay. In this example, only the Native American aspect would be classified as #ownvoices since that's the only marginalized aspect shared by the character and the author. (For the FAQ Duyvis did about #ownvoices, go to her [website](#).)

Why #ownvoices is needed

Attitudes and biases in publishing have historically been, and often still are, dominated by white, heterosexual, able-bodied decision-makers. When the people who decide what books make it to store bookshelves are not reflective of the wide variety of people who write and/or consume stories, therein lies a substantial problem. If the vast majority of the faces sitting around the table are white, a good portion of the time they will gravitate toward stories with characters who look like them, and which are written by authors who also look like them. In

that environment, stories by and about those not in the majority demographic get overlooked and left out.

“We need more diversity throughout the publishing industry—authors, characters, industry professionals,” author [Priscilla Oliveras](#) said. “When there are more people sitting at the table together, the conversations will be broader, richer, full of nuances ... just like the world in which we live.”

“It’s not uncommon to see and hear people not affected by nor part of an #ownvoices group talking about what’s ‘best’ for them,” author [Jordan Summers](#) said. “Women have been dealing with this problem forever. It is still hard for a woman to be heard. Now imagine that struggle coupled with a diverse culture, race, religion or sexual identity.”

The United States has been a diverse country in its demographics, as the world has been, for a long time. According to the last [U.S. Census in 2010](#), the prior decade saw a 43 percent jump in both the Hispanic and Asian populations in the United States. When you add in factors other than race that can marginalize an author, such as sexual orientation, religion, etc., the population at large is more varied than the publishing gatekeepers. #ownvoices supports the idea that a substantial effort needs to be made to diversify who is making the acquiring decisions because there are a lot of writers and readers who don’t look like those faces sitting around the decision-making table, and that diversity of decision-makers should also trickle down to the bookstore level.

“Stop segregating books in bookstores, to start,” author [Laurie Alice Eakes](#) said. “And in lines. If it’s romance, then for goodness sake shelve it, publish it under romance, or mystery, or whatever kind of book it is. I was appalled to learn that books by African-American romance authors were shelved in a different place. To me, that’s like publishing Jim Crow laws, not even *Plessy v. Ferguson*, not even separate but equal. It’s just separate and certainly unequal.”

Goal of #ownvoices

Besides the goal of seeing more diversity in the publishing industry from the top down, the #ownvoices movement also has a goal of raising awareness. The hashtag helps readers find stories that have a certain authenticity because they are written by authors who share certain characteristics with the main character(s). The movement also helps shine a spotlight on authors whose work otherwise might be overlooked due to reader bias, small print run, lack of promotion, the fact that it’s indie published and thus not in bookstores, or any number of other reasons wonderful books don’t get discovered. Another goal is that the amplification of marginalized voices would make those stories more mainstream.

“The issue is, was, and always has been about inclusion,” author [LaShawn Vasser](#) said. “That is the problem that needs to be addressed. The more diverse authors’ work available to readers, the less there will be a need for a hashtag.”

One hope of all involved is that someday the stories of today’s marginalized voices will no longer be marginalized but rather just as much a part of the mainstream as stories about white straight able-bodied characters written by white straight able-bodied authors. It would be a huge step forward if #ownvoices authors didn’t have to deal with the burden of questions that authors from non-marginalized backgrounds don’t have to address.

“It’s frustrating that my stories have to be about (or are assumed to be about) race,” author [Nicki Salcedo](#) said. “No one would dare ask Herman Melville if a black woman 100 years in the future would read *Moby Dick*. You write for your story to be told and heard. Some stories have more specific narratives regarding culture, but that isn’t meant to exclude other cultures but rather to share cultural experiences and show similarities.”

Eakes said authors from marginalized backgrounds have to walk a fine line between writing an authentic character and what the public is ready to accept.

“Writers without disabilities rarely have an understanding of the reality of life for us and therefore usually reinforce the paradigms of society,” she said.

Change is hard

When #ownvoices is discussed in author communities, there are many tough, uncomfortable and sometimes complicated questions posed, too much to be covered in a single article. Thus, this will be a three-part series. Next month watch for “In Their Own Voices, Part Two: Tackling the hard, uncomfortable questions on the road to change.”

Trish Milburn is the author of more than 40 titles of romance and young adult fiction for Harlequin, Penguin, Bell Bridge Books, Tule, as well as via indie publishing. When she’s not writing, she enjoys reading (duh), visiting museums, attending fan cons, cosplaying and indulging in her new love for Korean dramas and pop music.

An Insider Look at Traditional Publishing

An interview with Esi Sogah, Kensington

By Lynn Cahoon



Esi Sogah

This the second feature for Nink in which NINC members will interview agents, editors, and marketing professionals so that authors can get an in-depth look at how to network with traditional publishing. All questions came from those culled from questions asked on the traditional publishing loop, some verbatim. If you have a house/editor/marketing professional you'd like to see interviewed or if you'd like to volunteer to do an interview, please email: ninkeditor@gmail.com

Full disclosure, Esi Sogah is my editor at Kensington. I met her when I was running my RWA chapter's contests so when I had a project that didn't get any agent interest, I sent it directly to her, reminding her of her final judge service. It let her know we had some sort of connection, and you all know how important that is in this industry. She not only read my first cozy mystery, she bought it and two more. We've been working together now almost six years and I was lucky enough to be one of the first authors she took on when she joined Kensington. She is a senior editor at Kensington and works not only with cozy mystery authors like me but she also works with romance fiction.

Kensington publishes a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction titles. Per their website: *Kensington publishes over 500 fiction and non-fiction titles each year. Its diverse imprints include Zebra, Pinnacle, Dafina, and Lyrical Press which are well known for providing readers with a range of popular genres such as romance, women's fiction, African American, young adult and nonfiction, as well as true-crime, western, and mystery titles.*

What follows is my interview with Esi. Esi joined Kensington Publishing in January 2013 as a senior editor, working with such authors as Lynn Cahoon, Alyssa Cole, Kate Clayborn, and Tamara Berry. She is looking to acquire for all Kensington and Lyrical imprints. Fiction-

romance: historical (esp. American historical), contemporary; mystery: cozies, historical, suspense/thrillers; and upmarket fiction. When not reading or editing, you can find her on Twitter at [@esisogah](#).

Please note, Esi is only speaking as an editor of Kensington, and only about her company in her answers below, and as such, her answers should not be taken as being indicative of all publishing companies or as representative of NINC.

1. Besides “writing the best book,” what are things an author can do to advance their career? What are some “career” busters or mistakes that authors may not even know they are making?

Word of mouth is still the number one way consumers hear about books, so cultivating the best way to spread news of your books is important. Equally important is that the “best way” has to be the best way for you. A lot of authors spread themselves too thin on social media, or spend a lot of money on mailers, or fly from conference to conference and exhaust themselves. Whatever way works best for you is going to be the way you reach the most people. Yes, that other author might have 5,000 followers on Twitter. But if Twitter doesn’t come naturally to you, you aren’t going to get the same results even if you have twice as many followers.

2. How can an author be the best author for their publisher? How can authors be part of that team? How can authors create sustainability in their careers and what steps should an author take for achieving that?

Being aware of deadlines is hugely important for authors. It doesn’t mean you can’t ever be late. But recognizing that you need more time and communicating that to your publisher is going to go a long way, not just toward preserving a good relationship but also toward publishing the best book possible. Nothing is improved by scrambling. You have to be honest with yourself and with your team about the kind of time you have available for writing, revising, reviewing pages, and promoting, and then create a workable schedule around that. Consumers will respond more positively to one book every eighteen months like clockwork, than a pub date that keeps moving.

3. What are traditional publishers such as Kensington doing for their midlist and new-to-them authors (anyone other than your NYT/USA Today bestsellers). What type of house-wide plan and process should authors expect?

At Kensington, we are really focused on authors and their careers, so it’s important to us to craft a unique approach for each author and book. We’ll often look for similarities between authors, books, or themes, in order to harness the power of the group. This is especially helpful when working to get debut authors increased recognition. With midlist authors, we will work with them and their existing connections and accolades to identify areas they may be missing and bolster their support on those fronts. So while there are general things we’ll do for each book, there is a real effort to make sure we tailor to the specific needs of each author.

4. How important is an author's social media when choosing to purchase a series?

It really varies. Publishers certainly want to see some social media presence, simply because that is the main way authors reach readers, and vice versa. But we've also seen folks with huge social media presence and low sales. So again, quality over quantity can matter here.

5. Will editors consider purchasing authors who perhaps need new branding (such as a new name) because of low sales? When should the rebranding begin?

Yes, certainly, but it's important to remember that a new name **basically** means becoming a debut author again. If you are trying to gain distance from the sales of your old name, you're also distancing yourself from any reviews or praise received from that name. So I'd recommend having a complete manuscript, and/or a clear outline of your series, perhaps a few quotes or author friends who have pledged support, and if applicable, an explanation for the low sales—which could be as simple as “that genre isn't selling anymore.” None of this is about blame, but a publisher needs to know what obstacles you're trying to overcome in order to help you grow.

6. One author who has been in publishing nearly 40 years now asked the following question on the NINC loop: “I have seen many 'cycles' in NY — a pub would 'give' an author about six books, to see sell-through growth. Then it was bye-bye. For a while, that number seemed to slip lower before hearing 'don't let the door hit you in the rear on your way out.' Are there now pub houses who really mean it when they say they want to 'build' authors, are 'in this for the long haul?' Or is that all gone? Is that only found now, maybe, in smaller presses? Because, sadly, what worked for an author even as little as five years ago may not work today.” If you could address any or all of her question, that would be great.

This is a tricky question. It is perhaps more likely at smaller presses, but it's important to keep in mind that part of the reason for that is that smaller presses often have smaller advances. The risk is lower, but so is the initial outlay to the author. In addition, part of this change is driven by the shrinking number of bookstores, and shelves for books in stores, which is mostly out of the control of a publishing house. So where they used to be, say, room for 10 romances in a Walmart, now there's only room for five. So a publisher is naturally going to try to only keep their higher sellers, since those are the only ones who have a chance of making it onto the shelf. And that means you may do fewer or shorter contracts, since it's harder to predict what the bookselling landscape will look like a few years down the line.

7. What does a publisher do for me in the way of marketing (there's a basic minimum that every book gets and which authors may not even be aware of when they say, “My publisher did nothing for me!”)

One of the biggest things a publisher can give you is connections. We have the ability to pitch a group ad/sale/promo that individual authors can't (or, have to put a lot more effort into doing on their own). So not only are there the connections made between books, but we have established relationships with various businesses which allow us to create partnerships to bring more attention to our books. We also spend a lot of time looking at data in terms of what genres

of book (and even formats) work best at what time of year—I think a lot of authors may not know how big a role the marketing team can play in the publishing schedule.

8. What stands out about Kensington’s approach to marketing?

We have a communications team that combines marketing and publicity. That means each publicist is in charge of both aspects of outreach for each book. This allows for a more tailored approach, and better communication with authors. Each publicist also has (loosely defined) areas of specialty. This means they are perfectly positioned to recognize areas of cross-promotion and then craft the promotions, again without having to coordinate five other people’s schedules and workloads.

9. What is your biggest success, or your most surprising success/fail?

Generally, the thing that was hardest to get used to and that many people outside a publishing house don’t know is: attention doesn’t equal sales. I’ve had books get truly incredible reviews, lots of press attention, tons of social media chatter, but when it comes to actual sales? Crickets. I’ve also worked on books that it seems like no one is talking about, but the books have enormous sales numbers. So realizing that I needed to redefine what “success” and “failure” meant was probably the biggest surprise.

10. What have you just bought in each genre and what direction is that genre heading?

This is a tough one! It’s hard to keep track of time in publishing. I think recently in romance I’ve bought contemporary romances that have very strong women’s fiction/romantic comedy crossover. I think it’s clear from the success of such authors as Jasmine Guillory, that this is a booming trend. In mystery, a recent debut is Tamara Berry’s *Séances are for Suckers*, which has a slight paranormal bent to it. A little bit of magic seems to resonate with cozy readers.

11. Besides having a great manuscript, what does an author need to know about switching genres?

Get ready to learn about the quirks of a whole new audience. Things that might not have made you blink in one genre (love scenes, violence, swearing) can be absolutely taboo in another. Every genre, no matter how commercial or literary, has norms and audience expectations and it’s vital not to run afoul of these, especially when you’re starting out.

12. How can an author support their traditionally published books in ways that my publisher can't or won't? What can authors do? What promo works?

The best way to support a work is by engaging with readers. Readers are far more interested in what authors are up to and have to say than they are in any promotional email from a publisher. Making yourself accessible in a way that’s clear to the reader and comfortable for you—whether that’s Facebook, Goodreads, a newsletter, or appearances—is definitely key. If your book is in print, it’s definitely helpful to visit your local bookstores and identify yourself to them. Even if you don’t set up an event, you can sign stock. And anyway, it’s good for them to have a face to put with a name.

13. How does a professional author handle ghosting (never getting a reply) from a potential editor who'd requested a work?

If a reasonable amount of time has passed and you've followed up and still heard nothing? Ignore us! We don't do it to be mean, but get caught up in the cycle of guilt and not-replying that so many people do. Also, it may be that circumstances changed in a way that makes acquiring the book impossible, but not in a way that's easy to explain. The best thing to do is keep querying no matter who you are waiting to hear from. And maybe treat yourself to some ice cream. And know that we're sorry!

14. If you could look into your crystal ball for 2019, where do you see the market headed? What trends might be coming? What do readers want more of, and what are readers tired of seeing?

Oh boy. I definitely think romance will see more romantic comedies. The mystery world seems to be trending toward slightly younger characters than in years past. Also, while crafting-themed mysteries will always be popular, I think readers like seeing new and different professions for their amateur sleuths.

15. How has the #metoo movement affected romance? What should authors be aware of here? How has the #ownvoices movement affected romance? What should authors be aware of here? (We are running a three-part series on Own Voices in *Nink*.)

For both questions, the biggest change is in the questions you will be asked by press, readers, conferences, etc. There have always been books that address consent and diversity in these genres, so having an awareness that the conversation is new, but the issues aren't, is important. In addition, try to get clear with yourself on what you include in your books and why. Not everyone/book needs to address everything, and you don't want to find yourself tongue-tied if asked about your plot or characters.

16. Tell me all about the exciting things at Kensington that make it a great company to work with.

Lots of companies like to say they're like family, but we really are! Kensington is an independent, family-owned business, which is very unusual in this industry. It gives us the ability to respond quickly to market changes, to take some risks that perhaps you couldn't in a larger corporate environment, and to really get to know our authors.

17. Tell me a little bit about why you still love this job after all of these years.

There's nothing better than seeing an author's hard work out in the world. It's such an incredible achievement and to play a part in making that happen is the most incredible feeling. I wouldn't trade it for anything.

18. Anything else you think I've missed that NINC members should know?

This is a tough, constantly changing industry. It can at times be discouraging. But it's also true that people love to read—in all formats and genres. So as long as there are people, we'll need books.



Lynn Cahoon is a multi-published cozy mystery author with multiple hits on the NY Times and USA Today lists. She writes and self publishes romance under her pen name, Lynn Collins. She lives in the Midwest with her cat and husband.

An Insider Look at Traditional Publishing: Part II

An Interview with Tara Gelsomino, agent/owner at One Track Literary

By Michele Dunaway



Tara Gelsomino

This month features Tara Gelsomino, who describes herself as a voracious genre reader since childhood. Tara started her publishing industry career at *Romantic Times* magazine in 1998, before transitioning to audiobook publishing in 2005 with BBC Audiobooks America, where she created the world's first [crowd-sourced audiobooks](#) via Twitter with renowned bestselling authors Neil Gaiman and Meg Cabot. In 2013, she returned to her romance roots as the executive editor of *Crimson Romance*, a digital-first imprint for F+W Media and later Simon & Schuster, where she acquired and published more than 300 titles by new and up-and-coming authors. In 2018, she decided to pour her experience with contracts, editorial, and promotion, and her desire to help burgeoning authors craft long-term careers into launching her own company, [One Track Literary Agency, Inc.](#) Tara lives in Rhode Island with her husband and her rescue dog, Yoda. When she isn't reading or writing, she enjoys watching too much television, buying yarn (and occasionally even knitting it), seeing Broadway musicals, and traveling to new places.

Here's the interview:

1. Besides "writing the best book," what are things an author can do to advance their career? What are some "career" busters or mistakes that authors may not even know they are making?

Know the market. Pay attention to what editors are buying and what's selling. Don't write to trend, but be aware of what is currently in demand and what books, especially bestsellers, could be considered comparable to yours. Your agent will be doing this kind of research too, but as an agent, it's easier to work with someone who has an idea of what's realistic and possible, and who also has a notion of where they want their career to go.

Publishers (and other folks) will want to know what your “brand” is—figure that out before they ask. Identify what elements your books always seem to contain and what you excel at and enjoy writing—sexy, spicy, love stories with strong heroines, or funny, small-town cozy mysteries—and own that. (A lot of writers want to write everything all at once—it’s easier to build a career and a brand if you occupy one marketable niche, at least at first. There’ll be time for diversification later.)

Follow an agent or editor’s guidelines to submit to them in the way they request. The sheer volume of submissions an editor or agent gets every day/week/month means they have to have quick ways to find exactly what they’re looking for from your query or sample. Don’t try to dazzle them with an outside-of-the-box approach to “set yourself apart from the crowd.” If you can write a sharp, engaging premise, that will put you head-and-shoulders above most of what’s coming to their inboxes.

2. How can an author be the best author for their publisher? How can authors be part of that team?

Be polite, be professional, and be prompt when asked for things by your publisher. If you have questions, definitely ask them; don’t assume you’re being a bother or a pest. Editors are busy people, but I’ve never met one who didn’t want to answer a well-asked question. They’ve also been in the business for so long sometimes, that they’ll assume certain things are common knowledge, so a question can help them out if they forget to explain or tell you something.

The bottom line is the publisher is your partner, and though it may not feel like it—it’s an equal partnership. You’re both trying to contribute to the success of this book—so be ready to bring things to the table. If you have ideas or feedback, make them known. If it’s difficult (because you don’t agree with something they’re doing or want to do), talk to your agent and let her handle the hard conversation of conveying that to the publisher.

3. How can authors create sustainability in their careers and what steps should an author take for achieving that? How does having an agent fit into this role?

The best thing you can be is flexible. Publishing is a rapidly changing business, so be ready to adapt and be open to new ideas. Agents can help you create a career plan, look for new opportunities in the industry, and gently but firmly tell you when you might be steering down the wrong path.

4. What are agents doing for their midlist and/or new-to-you authors (anyone other than your *NYT/USA Today* bestsellers). What type of strategies should authors/agents be focused on when trying to sell and promote books?

With newer and midlist authors, continually looking for new rights sales is always important. Finding ways to exploit rights on backlist can be key. For example, amid the success of the *Crazy Rich Asians* movie last summer, I was able to pitch and get an offer within 24 hours on the previously unexploited audio rights for a romance series featuring Asian American leads. (Shameless plug: Ruby Lang’s *Practice Perfect* trilogy, coming to Audible in March.) Looking for those kinds of unexpected opportunities based on the wider cultural marketplace is a way

agents can add value and gain exposure for their clients.

Agents don't always get involved directly in marketing and promotion to readers the way authors and publishers do, but they can certainly use their experience and industry knowledge and expertise to help authors determine what might be good investments of their time (or funds).

5. How important is an author's social media in deciding what type of author to sign? What mistakes do you see authors make, or what strategies should they apply?

It doesn't really matter that much to me, especially if the book is fantastic. Most publishers will want authors to have some kind of a social presence, even if it's small to start with, because you want readers to be able to easily connect with the author and gain information.

But if you really hate social media, then don't do it. Or find the one platform you like, and start small. Don't force yourself to participate if you really hate it—readers will be able to tell.

One mistake I sometimes see, especially with new/unpublished authors, is sharing too much self-doubt or just the drudgery of the day-to-day writing process on social media. If I'm considering taking on an author who I see is always degrading their own talent and being very negative on social, I might think twice about signing them on. Because if you keep telling me (and readers) you're not very good at this, I will eventually believe you. The occasional frustrated rant is fine, but if it's every day or even several times a week, that can be wearisome. Have confidence in yourself and your abilities and let your social accounts be a mostly positive space where readers can be excited and share in your joy.

6. What should a publisher do for an author in the way of marketing (as in, is there a basic minimum that every book should get, which authors may not even be aware of when they say, "My publisher did nothing for me!")

Almost all publishers are going to provide a professional-looking cover and marketing copy for you, promote you on their social media accounts and in their direct newsletters, and list you on their website and in their catalogues if they have them. Nearly all will try to solicit reviews for you by sending out physical ARCs and hard copies and/or making your digital ARCs available at NetGalley or Edelweiss. Their sales reps will be trying to market you to stores and libraries to place big orders and highlight your title in their displays and promotions. Their subrights team will market you to attract audio and foreign sales interest. Some publishers' promo and marketing teams may organize cover reveals, excerpt reveals, blog tours and write-ups, promo articles that tie in to newsworthy trends or happenings, reviews, interviews, and Q&As. A handful will organize conference appearances and physical bookstore tours (this may depend on the book's genre, whether or not you're a lead title for the publisher, and a variety of other factors.)

On the digital side, they'll formulate the right metadata and keywords to attract buyers' attention, organize ads and key store placement with major e-retailers, and they'll plan sales that they may advertise with discount sites like BookBub. And that's the tip of the iceberg generally. You will not be a party to 80 percent of this effort, but trust it's happening because publishing is a business and publishers really do want the titles they buy to make money.

7. What is your biggest success, or your most surprising success/fail?

When I opened OTLA in April 2018, I'd been hearing for a while that it was impossible to sell into romance because the market was shrinking and no one would take a chance on new authors. But my first sale was a three-book series to the top publishing house for a previously only self-pubbed author. It sold in a pre-empt on a ten-chapter proposal for mid-five figures late last summer. That proved to me that if you have a great voice and a fresh concept, there will still be publishers eager to step up to the plate.

8. What authors have you signed and what direction do you see specific genres heading?

So far I've signed romance and young adult authors, but I'm also seeking thrillers and psychological suspense (think Marisha Pessl, Tana French, Gillian Flynn, Harlen Coben, etc.) and women's fiction with fresh angles (not so much the usual empty nest/cancer/infidelity journeys). I think we're going to see an explosion of more women's fiction, especially younger/comedic ones crossing over with romance, following in the wake of the kind of success Berkley is having with *The Wedding Date*, *The Kissing Quotient*, etc., and also more historical and past/present dual narratives. I think YA that tackles social issues is very prevalent right now, and reflective of the audience reading these, and we're going to see even more of that. Personally, I'm also looking for more upmarket romances that pair a literary voice with a truly romantic story with a happy ending.

9. Besides having a great manuscript, what does an author need to know about switching genres and/or finding a new agent?

If you have a great manuscript, you really don't need anything else. That's the thing and you're doing it. But again, following directions on how to submit is really helpful for busy agents and editors. Referrals are also a great way to find a new agent; ask your friends to introduce you, and agents will often prioritize those submissions.

10. How can an author support their trad published books in ways that my publisher can't or won't? What can authors do? What promo works?

There will never be a bigger cheerleader for your book than you. (Nope, not even your mom.) You wrote it, you know the thing backwards and forwards and upside down. You know what trends and topics you can tie it to and bring attention to it. You know the funny bits, and the sad bits, and that one weird bit in chapter 27. You also have one book to promote, versus the 15/48/112/583 titles coming out from your publisher that year. So plan to spend a considerable chunk of time telling people what makes your book so awesome, because no one knows that better than you.

The number one marketing/promo thing an author can do on their own is build their direct-to-customer outreach—usually via newsletters. Give your readers fun incentives to keep following you (exclusive excerpts beyond what's available elsewhere, special cut scenes, Pinterest boards and playlists, maybe the occasional reader giveaway) and ask them to pre-

order and leave you reviews. These people (presumably) already like you if they've opted in, so give them the content they're looking for. Social media is also direct, but much more fleeting and less of a thoughtful time investment—we see a lot of ads and promotion on social, or sometimes we don't, because algorithms. A newsletter is the best way to hook and maintain a readership.

(Also—far too often author websites do not contain any excerpt or sample of the writer's work. Don't make me click over to Amazon to see an excerpt. Showcase your writing right on your own page.)

Word of mouth works if it's really genuine and excited *and* reaches a lot of people. Social media can work if it's not a constant hard sell (from you—hard sell from others on your books A-OK!), and you really understand and like to engage in whichever platform you're using and interact on a very human level with others. Pay attention to what kind of coverage similar books are getting and contact those sources to see if they'll cover your book too (or ask your publicity team/publisher if they have or can contact those sources). In terms of paid marketing, always consider your ROI (return on investment).

Unfortunately, there's no magic formula for promo/marketing or everyone would be using it already. It's a lot of trial and error. So try some things, but don't get too caught up in it to the extent you shortchange your writing time or spend money you haven't earned yet or are unlikely to earn.

11. How does a professional author handle ghosting (never getting a reply) from a potential agent or editor who'd requested a work?

The sheer mass of submissions that an agent or editor gets often means they just aren't able to respond to everything. Most will try to respond within a few months generally (their submission guidelines should give you an idea of when to expect a response), and a polite inquiry as to the status of your submission after about six weeks is usually just fine.

12. If you could look into your crystal ball for 2019, where do you see the market headed? What trends might be coming? What do readers want more of, and what are readers tired of seeing?

I'm hopeful that we'll see a bit more fun. It's a dark time culturally right now for a lot of folks, and I would expect that the industry will swing toward more comedy and comfort reads as a response to that, but, conversely I think activism, social justice, and the resistance will also be themes we see more centered in all genres.

13. How has the #metoo movement affected romance? What should authors be aware of here?

Consent has long been a carefully considered, centralized point in the best romances—that will only increase, most likely. But I think we'll see a shift maybe in the way we define an alpha hero. That pre-emptive offer on proposal I mentioned above was for a series about alpha men reading romance and openly and proudly rejecting toxic masculinity in favor of respecting and treating women right. (Shameless plug: Lyssa Kay Adams' *The Bromance Book Club*, coming

November 2019 from Berkley.) I think maybe we'll see a bit more blending of alpha and beta traits in our heroes in upcoming romances, and maybe a bit more activist, feminist heroines as well.

14. How has the #ownvoices movement affected publishing? What should authors be aware of here?

The shockingly low numbers reported in The Ripped Bodice's annual report on diverse representation in romance clearly show there are still not nearly enough own voices being published, and the PW employment survey shows us there isn't nearly enough representation on publisher staffs. So there's a lot to be done.

I do think having more conversation and more awareness and more light shined on the imbalances here is the key to provoking change. But traditional publishing is very slow to change. On an individual level, there are editors and agents very hungry for fresh, diverse voices, but on a systemic level, publishing thrives on repeating the success of what's come before all too often. We've been hearing publishers say they want to publish #ownvoices for the past few years, and it's been thrilling to see an uptick in big deals offered to romance authors of color, like Nalini Singh, Alexis Daria, and Sandhya Menon, over the past few months. But they can't be the exceptions to the rule.

It'll be interesting to see if real change has begun to be enacted when the new Ripped Bodice Diversity Report comes out in March. Having led the Crimson Romance digital imprint, which was #3 on their inaugural list in March 2017 and climbed substantially to #1 for representation in 2018 while most other publishers' numbers actually dropped, I'm personally very interested to see what the survey looks like in a post-Crimson world. (S&S shuttered the imprint in March 2018).

15. Tell me all about the exciting things at One Track Literary that make it a great company to work with.

It's been really fun and exhilarating being basically a one-woman band at OTLA. I founded the agency shortly after Crimson was closed because I've always really been more of an author advocate at heart, even as I held editorial, marketing, contracting, and managing jobs at various publishers. I wanted to help some of our Crimson authors find new homes and also discover new, exciting voices that I could help shepherd through the crazy process of pitching and negotiating deals. I think one of the benefits of signing with a small boutique agency like OTLA is that I'm available and eager to help with anything an author needs regarding their career. I'm very editorial and will work with a client to polish the manuscript to its max potential before pitching. I'll help them navigate offers and explain contracts and deal points, negotiate terms and exploit rights for new opportunities. And after a deal is made, I'm happy to advise on marketing and promotional decisions and aid in publicity efforts. My client list is small, and purposely so, so that even as I am growing and accepting new clients, I have the time to give my all to my current roster of authors.

16. Tell me a little bit about why you still love agenting. What do you want to see?

I really love the variety of tasks that agenting includes. I get to really foster a book throughout the entire process from a kernel of an idea to a published product in the marketplace and that's incredibly gratifying! It's also been fun seeing the process from this side of the desk, so to speak.

17. Anything else you think I've missed that NINC members should know?

I'm currently seeking completed manuscripts with vibrant, fresh voices in these genres: romance (especially romantic comedies), women's fiction with fresh hooks, thrillers and psychological suspense (no cozy mysteries please), and contemporary young adult. Own Voices are especially welcome. Check out my website, including my submission guidelines and manuscript wish list at <http://www.onetrackliterary.com>. I accept submissions of a query letter, synopsis, and attachment of the first three chapters via Query Manager at <http://QueryMe.Online/OTLA>.



Michele Dunaway is your Nink editor. She's learning a great deal from these interviews and hopes you are too.

Networking: Are We Doing It Right?

Using critiques loops, listservs and direct email as networking tools

By Michele Dunaway



This is the second feature for Nink in which we discuss various ways authors can and do network for mutual benefit. If you have a topic you'd like to see discussed or if you'd like to volunteer to write about a topic, please email ninkeditor@gmail.com. See the Feb. 2019 issue for the article titled "The Whole Scoop on Cover Quotes."

Back in September, during my "Year of Travel," and while I was at the NINC conference, I saw a post about an auction offering a 100-page critique from a big name agent. My roommate said, "That's my dream agent," so I decided to make a bid. I set my highest proxy price. I won, and that agent—while she didn't offer any representation nor did I ask—nailed what I had been struggling with and why the manuscript didn't work.

I then polished the beginning, and still not satisfied, I asked the NINC critique group for volunteers. Several people stepped up, and each reaffirmed that my changes were great and then added that "But..." which helped to push the manuscript opening further and make it better. The manuscript is now complete and I'm happy with it. I've dubbed 2019 my "Year of Change." I'm either going to stay traditional or go indie—and this year I must decide, as it's time. It's scary, but I won't be alone, because I've got a network of people I can rely on, and all because of NINC.

But how you use and approach a network is important. People want to help, but there's a right way and a wrong way to go about it. The key is to understand that no one you approach should feel, at any time, obligated to help you. They should *want* to help you because you've been approachable, respectful, honest and forthright. You've also been professional and not taken any rejection personally, and that includes whining about it on any public forum.

Critique loop

If you're not in a critique group, I encourage you to join the NINC critique group. We are a friendly bunch of indie, hybrid and traditional authors, and it was wonderful to put names and faces together at the NINC conference.

However, before you join, know what the group won't do. It's not a place where you can depend on an entire manuscript getting read. In fact, I've got a manuscript right now with a developmental editor (ouch, but worth the cost) because I need the entire thing read, and as we are all published authors, we can't expect others to read 85,000 words when we're also working on our own projects. While you can ask, understand you might not even get an answer unless someone on the loop has time, and even then, the person might not be able to finish the project, and you have to be willing to take that risk.

However, the group is a wonderful network of supportive people. We've brainstormed and critiqued cover blurbs and pitches, helped with plotlines and read opening pages online. Members have also agreed to read things offline, everything from single chapters to blurbs.

A few networking tips:

1. Don't waste anyone's time. Be specific in what you need. If you do not get a response, then you may need to adjust your expectations.
2. Wait a day or two after posting for all those on digest to read the work and respond. While you can respond immediately, don't make changes to your work for a day or two. That way you'll see the entire thread of comments before you decide what to change.
3. Feel free to privately email members of the critique loop with questions, but don't fail to bring back any revisions to the main loop if others are still involved in the process.
4. Don't change the thread title without alerting the group.

For more information on forming your own in-person or online critique group, please see the series of articles on critiques in the August and September 2018 issues of *Nink*.

Direct email

LinkedIn says that corporate email users receive an average of 120 emails per day. The site advises that after you send an email, give the recipient at least a week to 10 days, and to remember that emails do get lost in inboxes. LinkedIn advises that this period provides time to sort through their inbox and get back to you. If they don't get back to you, then it's appropriate to send a follow-up email.

Forbes Magazine's Samantha Harrington said that a key to getting your email read is to have a subject line that will "describe the email's content and allude to a specific ask."

During my daughter's job search, she's been sending a lot of email. As she's working with alumnae of her college, in her subject line is the college name and that she's a recent graduate, and the words that indicate career advice is needed. This is a great example of how to get your email the right kind of attention.

Another key is to be relatable and personal, and be sure you've done your research. Your email should not be generic in any way. ("Dear Author" rejection letters, anyone?)

The following are a few suggestions to make your email experience, and that of others, more effective:

1. Don't waste anyone's time with frivolity. When emailing someone directly, be specific in what you need and clear in your subject line who you are and how you know the person. I can't tell you how many times I've emailed another author using the subject line NINC author has question about XXX and received a quick response because mentioning NINC has gotten through the spam.
2. Be sure to address the person by name. Don't use Hello or Dear Friend in your subject line either. Never use To Whom It May Concern in email.
3. If you send a follow up then include the text of the previous email. If still no response, you may have been ghosted. You now have a choice to make. Try addressing what you are asking in a different way so that your email doesn't get routed to spam. A good place to see spam words is at <https://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/30684/the-ultimate-list-of-email-spam-trigger-words.aspx>
4. However, once you've received a response and sent your thanks, at the same time, don't keep emailing when it's clear that the person you've emailed has had the last word. At some point, emails are like the phone calls between lovers who say, "You hang up." "No, you hang up." If it's over, don't respond. In this day and age, don't give them something else to read.
5. And what if you really have been ghosted? Sometimes people just don't respond. Maybe they're giving you a silent "no," and maybe they just don't read their email. It happens. Try not to take it personally. You may simply have to decide to move on and realize that they aren't ever getting back to you. It sucks, but at some point you can't keep beating your head against a wall. (And as much as you want to complain about it on social media—don't. Create no ghosts that can come back to haunt you.)

Listserv

If you are sending an email or post to a list serve, be friendly and concise. Also be clear if your request is personal (of interest or benefit only to you) or professional (of interest or benefit to the entire group).

Example, if you're collecting books for charity or a library, you should use the sentence "Please respond off list," in your email/post, which asks for responses to be sent directly to your email and not to the entire group. You can't help it if people do respond to the loop, but at least you didn't ask them to do so.

Also, as a general rule of thumb, wait a day or two after posting for all those on digest to read and respond before you engage in long conversations with respondents, which in turn makes those long conversations become their own thread. When conversations become far too long and impossible to follow, many who might have answered you skip over or delete the email, and you lose people who might have helped you.

Here are a few general guidelines:

1. Use a descriptive subject.
2. Questions and responses should be of discussion topics or questions that are of interest to the entire list.
3. Personal replies should be emailed to the specific person by cutting and pasting the sender's e-mail address when replying rather than simply hitting "Reply."
4. void all the thanks, welcome, hope you are well, or can you email me off list replies to the whole list.
5. Never respond to a post "Me too!" If you want the information, email the person off list.
6. Always cut out the email thread before you respond. This is a good way to avoid having the listserv administrator admonish you. Trust me, you're annoying everyone if you leave all the garbage at the end of every digest post.
7. Finally, when you are posting to the NINC listserv, it's also extremely annoying when you have 10-50+ lines of books and awards following your name. Everyone has simply been too polite to tell you. You don't need to sell us who you are. We know you're a published author, just like us. Keep your taglines to no more than three.
8. Within a few days, send a thank-you email or follow-up questions to anyone who has helped you, and do this off the listserv unless the information would be of use to everyone. Think of a listserv as announcement only—unless you have things to report back, always try to reduce the clutter and volume.

One warning, that most of us know, sometimes when we ask for help we get what we don't want. Even if you don't get great advice, send your thanks anyway.

Finally, if you get the help you need and it's awesome, remember that later someone also may need help, and if you are able, pay it forward. Yes, sometimes having it come back and bite us is a risk we take, but judge the email as you judged your own, and go with your gut. I can't tell you how grateful I am that Sandra Marton answered her email and offered me a nugget of information—I sold my first book partially because of the information she provided, which pointed me in the correct direction.

Michele Dunaway is your Nink editor. She's declared 2019 her year of change.

Unearthing Hidden Clues About Your Creativity: Answers, Part 3

By Denise A. Agnew



Since December, I've discussed the process of discovering hidden clues to what may impede your creativity. This month I'm focusing on how a reading audience and how bad reviews can influence and sometimes impair a writer's creativity. In Part One of the series I asked you to thoroughly answer several questions, so if you want to see the full list, check out the December 2018 issue of *Nink* in the members-only section.

The questions we're exploring this month are:

1. *Who do you think your audience is? Does your audience have to approve in order for you to write? Does your audience control what you write? Why?*
2. *Are you worried about bad reviews that might never happen? Do you give every bad review more credit than it deserves? What do you believe a bad review says about your writing?*

If you explored these questions, you've probably already discovered answers for yourself, but let's look deeper at what might be at the heart of some of your answers:

Lack of belief in your own instincts and the need for extreme outside validation.

As a creativity coach, I've noticed at least three types of writers who are more likely to suffer writer's block:

- Writers who work hard to please an audience despite their own creative urges.
- Writers who always take publisher and agent advice over and above their own instincts.
- Writers who place more weight on the bad reviews than the good.

I see one type of writer who will usually soldier on no matter what:

- A writer who balances involving readers in their world (sometimes publishers and agents), and yet honors their own creative needs.

Beloved Readers vs. Dreadful Audience

When does a beloved reader turn into a dreadful audience? The possibility of this toxic relationship between writer and reader depends on many factors, including the basic personality of the writer. If a writer has a healthy ego, the chances of a reader tearing down the writer's reason to create are reduced substantially. A writer with low self-esteem will have difficulty withstanding criticism, even if said criticism is well-intentioned and constructive. Of course, even the most stalwart writer can wince if a reader expresses displeasure, but they're less likely to dropkick writing all together.

Most writers want people to love their writing, but many of the most creative and mentally and physically healthy writers I know place less emphasis on whether an audience is happy with their books.

New writers often imagine scenarios related to audience adoration: crowds lining up at a book signing. Bestseller lists. Grabbing a high-profile agent and/or publisher. Making gobs of money. All of these things are highly desired, and none of these goals are inherently bad. Many writers are told that audience approval is the hallmark of a good writer. Therefore, if any one or all of the above goals are not met, a writer's creativity can be flushed straight down the toilet.

Writers who ignore creative urges are almost certain to encounter a creative block of long-lasting proportions. An example I've mentioned before is a writer who has been writing romance in one subgenre for years despite desperately wanting to write another type of romance or an entirely different genre. This might be because of advice from any outlet, including agents and editors.

Another unhealthy move, in my opinion, is the writer who relentlessly asks readers for copious input. What books should I write next? If I don't write the same type of characters in each book, will you stop reading my books or hate them? In this writer's mind that anxiety is always there, blocking the decision/opportunity to do something different and make them happy.

Horrid reviews

Great reviews are, well, great. There's no arguing that. Negative or lukewarm reviews that say the same thing over and over again, even if they are constructive criticisms, can be temporarily depressing. A healthy writer should take the attitude of first seeing if these reviews hit upon writing flaws that the writer can improve. Outrageous or cruel reviews shouldn't be taken to heart. An example of an outrageous and cruel review: "This book is porn written by a 12-year-old." (A real review written about one of my erotic romance books.) The attitude I took is to realize that the review says something about the reader and not my book, especially when most other reviews on the story were favorable, and that my story in no way would qualify as

pornography. A reviewer who makes personal attacks on the author and not just the writing should also be dismissed.

Trust yourself

What can you do to learn to trust your instincts and stop relying so heavily on both outside opinion and validation? Here are a few suggestions:

- Consider taking a course or reading books on how to increase self-esteem and intuition.
- Listen to authors who have been around for a while. Which ones have consistently created? If they inspire you, are they advocating that there is only one right way to take this journey, or do they inspire you by advocating that you trust your creative instincts?
- Read books on creativity. These can be books on all aspects of creating, not just writing.
- Pay attention to what makes you happy.

Writers who cultivate a belief and trust in their instincts and rely less on an outside audience for advice and validation have a much better chance of creating for a lifetime.

Next month we'll tackle the following two questions:

1. *What are your writing goals?*
2. *Are you afraid to examine your own fears and use them in your writing?*

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The Mad Scribbler

Their Voices

By Laura Resnick



“Representation is so important, especially in these days, but I hope the core messages of a book written by a PoC is equally important. Oppression. Racism. Injustice. Fear.”

—Amélie Wen Zhao, January 3, 2018 (Twitter)

Blood Heir, the first novel of a planned YA fantasy trilogy by Amélie Wen Zhao, entered public life as a social media Cinderella story, then subsequently got bogged down in a Twitter mob nightmare.

Born in Paris and raised in Beijing, Zhao immigrated to the U.S. at the age of 18. An article on [Vulture](#) states that Zhao acquired her literary agent, Peter Knapp, via “a Twitter pitching event for marginalized creators,” and he then sold her trilogy “at auction in a high six-figure deal with Delacorte.”

Zhao was active in social media, reputedly a positive and upbeat Twitter participant, supportive of fellow authors, and addressing issues she faced as a PoC (“person of color”).

It was when ARCs were recently distributed for her *Blood Heir* that the excrement hit the fan. Originally scheduled for June 2019 release and anticipated (by Delacorte, at least) as “the hottest fantasy debut of the summer,” the novel was described by many as a retelling of Anastasia (the true story, which has inspired multiple fictional adaptations, of a woman who claimed to be a Romanov princess who had survived the 1917 slaughter of the Czar’s family and escaped Russia).

[Slate](#) summarizes the plot of *Blood Heir* as follows: “Princess Anastacya Mikhailov has been forced to live in secrecy because she shares the same blood and powers as the empire’s enslaved population, Affinites. When Ana is framed for her father’s death, she sets out to find her father’s killer.”

The portrayal of Ana and of the Affinites, the slaves in the world of *Blood Heir*, is the genesis of the controversy. A Twitter firestorm erupted after release of the ARCs, fueled by accusations

that Zhao's novel was "racially insensitive toward the black community," promoted "a problematic archetype that perpetuates anti-blackness," exhibited "internalized racism" and "blatant bigotry," treated black characters as disposable, and portrayed the stereotypical "Magical Negro."

As the Twitter fire grew hotter, other accusations followed, such as plagiarism. *Slate*, *Vulture*, and the *New York Times* all assert these accusations were highly questionable. I take plagiarism seriously, and the specific accusations against Zhao strike me as so flimsy that I decline to repeat them, since I think such claims trivialize a serious matter (particularly at a time when a romance writer is [credibly accused](#) of plagiarizing from more than 20 novelists).

Anyhow, the Twitter fire grew so hot, Zhao announced a few weeks ago that she was *withdrawing her book from publication*, and it will not be released in June, after all. As of this writing, it's unclear what the fate of Zhao's trilogy will be.

But here's the thing: Based on the sections of the book quoted by Zhao's accusers, as well as accounts by various journalists, the descriptions of characters and groups in the world of Zhao's book don't correspond to racial groups in the real world. Moreover, the Affinites are distinguished by their magical powers, not by any physical or racial characteristics. Zhao was criticized for a portrayal of race that some people read in her novel, but which other people assert (persuasively) was not there.

Many Zhao critics on Twitter were offended by her book's misrepresentation of historic slavery in the United States... even though, according to Zhao, that's not what she was writing about or inspired by, and she never intended for her work to be viewed as a metaphor for the enslavement of Africans in America.

Referencing her own background of growing up in China, Zhao wrote in a public statement, when announcing her decision to cancel publication of *Blood Heir*, "The issues around Affinite indenturement in the story represent a specific critique of the epidemic of indentured labor and human trafficking prevalent in many industries across Asia, including in my own home country. The narrative and history of slavery in the United States is not something I can, would, or intended to write."

Her inspiration didn't come from, allude to, or symbolize the subject (three centuries of U.S. slavery) that she's being criticized for portraying incorrectly.

Zhao added, "But I recognize that I am not writing in merely my own cultural context."

Well, yes, the United States has its own long and culturally specific history of enslavement. That does not mean, however, that our own national experience of slavery is the only one that exists (far from it), or the only one we recognize, or the only one we read about or see portrayed in films, TV shows, and documentaries. A story can certainly be about slavery without portraying *our* historic "peculiar institution."

Moreover, it is a common convention of fantasy novels to eliminate the constraints of specific cultural and historic touchstones by creating imaginary worlds and cultures, as Zhao did, where human conflicts and conditions (such as oppression, racism, injustice, and fear) can be explored in a more universal way. I can't evaluate whether Zhao did this well or competently, since the book isn't available (and now we don't know whether it will *ever* be available), but it's clear from advance promo for the novel and descriptions of the story that this

was indeed the type of framework she used.

Yet she wound up the target of an infuriated social media mob accusing her of racism. Moreover, this wasn't just a pack of anonymous trolls. Some of the harshest comments came from YA authors. And such incidents have become common in YA.

Only days ago, for example, *Reason* published a [piece](#) about Kosoko Jackson, who has described himself as “a vocal champion of diversity in YA literature, the author of YA novels featuring African American queer protagonists, and a sensitivity reader for Big Five Publishers.” (A sensitivity reader is someone who shares a lived experience or identity with a fictional character in your novel, and who reads the manuscript to offer feedback on whether the portrayal is authentic and unbiased.) Sourcebooks planned to release Jackson's YA debut novel, *A Place for Wolves*, this month. (“An adventure-romance between two young men set against the backdrop of the Kosovo War,” it's described as a “heartbreaking and poignant story of survival.”)

However, like *Blood Heir*, it's a book you won't be able to find, because Sourcebooks announced on Feb. 28 that, *at the author's request*, it has withdrawn the novel from the publishing schedule. According to *Reason*, Jackson was part of a Twitter mob that attacked YA novelists, including the attack on Zhao. Then, when ARCs of his novel were released, the mob turned on him, and he has chosen to cancel the book.

Jesse Singal, author of the *Reason* article, notes that these “call-outs, draggings, and pile-ons almost always involve claims that books are insensitive with regard to their treatment of some marginalized group, and the specific charges... often don't seem to warrant the blowups they spark—when they make any sense at all.”

(Additional examples of YA social media mobs I've read about when researching this topic include attacks on [The Black Witch](#) and [American Heart](#). I've linked these two titles to informative articles rather than trying to recount those complex episodes here.)

There is a thoughtful [TED Talk](#) about this phenomenon by YA and children's writer Nora Raleigh Baskin. Like Zhao, Baskin acknowledges that representation is important: “Without question, marginalized groups have not had the opportunity to write and to publish their own stories in their own voices. And as a result, their stories have often been littered with dangerous and pervasive stereotypes, their lives and histories misrepresented or erased altogether.”

Baskin has stretched beyond her own background, as novelists often do, to research and write fiction about other walks of life. In 2010, she won the Schneider Family Book Award, given by the American Library Association, for her portrayal of an autistic boy in *Anything But Typical*, and her *Nine, Ten: A September 11 Story* portrayed four racially and religiously diverse children.

“But now I have to ask myself something,” she says. “Would I be brave enough in this heated, angry, bifurcated social media culture to have written any of those books that were not concretely about *my* life? Would I be afraid to create a character that was not of my culture, not my background, not my particular disability, not my religion, not my gender, not my sexual preference? And the answer is: I don't know.”

Baskin noted that she was posing these questions in the wake of seeing a YA author withdraw a book from publication after being attacked by a social media mob.

I thought she was talking about Zhao... until I noticed the date on the video: May 2018. At

least eight months before Zhao apologized for offending a social media mob and announced she wouldn't publish her novel.

Baskin didn't name who she was talking about nearly a year ago, and with so many incidents occurring, I had no idea *which* targeted author she was describing.

The mob spoke, and their voices drowned out the novelist.

Laura Resnick is the author of novels, short stories, and nonfiction.

September 25 - September 29, 2019



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Registration: <https://ninc.com/conferences/registration/2019-member-registration/>
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Conference e-list: <https://groups.io/g/BeachNINC2019>

Membership Benefits

Need industry intel, software, or legal help? We've got you covered.

Are you taking advantage of all your member benefits?

As a NINC member, your benefits include industry discounts, newsletter and website articles, professional services directory, networking opportunities, and more.

We've compiled all of these—which you can also find on our website—into this list as a helpful reminder.

Networking

The email list for Novelists, Inc. Members: <https://groups.io/g/NINCLINK>

Join our Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NovelistsInc/>

We offer a critique/brainstorming group: <https://groups.io/g/NINKcritique>

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Conference 2019: Planning For Success

Conference information: <https://ninc.com/conferences/about-the-ninc-conference/>

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Articles & Links: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/articles-and-links/>

Welcome Packet: http://ninc.com/system/assets/uploads/2017/01/2017_New_Member_Welcome_Packet-public.pdf

Member discounts

As mentioned in Michael L. Banner's article in this issue of *Nink*, NINC members can use a professional filing service to set up a new entity for free: you pay only the state fees and a shipping & handling fee. See details about this exclusive offer for NINC members from SmallBiz.com, Inc. on the [Member Discounts](#) page.

IngramSpark has updated their offer of free title setup for print, ebook and print/ebook until January 31, 2020. At that time they'll evaluate how often we use it, so by all means, use this nice perk and help us keep the discount! You'll find more information, as well as the code to use, on our [Members Benefits and Discounts](#) page, along with a list of various other professional discounts that are available to NINC members.

Volunteer

One of the greatest benefits of NINC is the opportunity to volunteer your talents to benefit other members—which pays incredible and unexpected dividends in networking and knowledge. Learn more about volunteer opportunities here: <https://ninc.com/members-only/open-positions/>

Open positions include:

- Social Media Committee
- Tweet Team
- Recruiting New Members
- 2019 Conference Promoter
- Anything!



Founded in 1989

NINC Statement of Principle

Novelists, Inc., in acknowledgment of the crucial creative contributions novelists make to society, asserts the right of novelists to be treated with dignity and in good faith; to be recognized as the sole owners of their literary creations; to be fairly compensated for their creations when other entities are profiting from those creations; and to be accorded the respect and support of the society they serve.

Founders

- Rebecca Brandewyne
- Janice Young Brooks
- Jasmine Cresswell
- Maggie Osborne
- Marianne Shock

2019 Board of Directors

If you have questions regarding Novelists, Inc., please contact a member of the Board of Directors.

- President: Wayne Stinnett
- President-Elect: Alyssa Day
- Secretary: Sue Phillips
- Treasurer: Pam McCutcheon
- Newsletter Editor: Michele Dunaway
- Advisory Council Representative: Lou Aronica

Advisory Council

- Lou Aronica
- Brenda Hiatt Barber
- Linda Barlow
- Jean Brashear
- Janice Young Brooks
- Laura Parker Castoro
- Meredith Efken
- Donna Fletcher
- Kay Hooper
- Barbara Keiler

- Julie Leto
- Pat McLaughlin
- Kasey Michaels
- Julie Ortolon
- Diana Peterfreund
- Pat Rice
- Erica Ridley
- Marianne Shock
- Vicki Lewis Thompson
- Victoria Thompson
- Steven Womack

2019 Committees

- *Complete committee member listings are available on the website. Many committee positions are open and looking for new volunteers.*
- 2019 Conference Committee:
 - Conference Director: Mel Jolly
 - Programming: Alyssa Day
 - Sponsorship: Rochelle Paige
 - Logistics: Karen Fox
 - Registration: Mindy Neff
- Authors Coalition Rep: Laura Phillips & Wayne Stinnett
- Social Media Coordinator:
 - Rick Gualtieri
 - Sue Phillips
- Membership Committee
 - Chair: Sarah Woodbury
 - Boyd Craven
- *Nink* Newsletter
 - Editor: Michele Dunaway
 - Assistant Editor: Susan Anderson
 - Copy Editor: Cynthia Moyer
 - Production Manager: Laura Resnick
- Nominating Committee:
 - Emilie Richards
 - Barbara Dunlop
 - Tawdra Kandle
 - Karen King
 - Pat Van Wie
- Technology Committee
 - Nick Thacker
 - Elizabeth Ann West
 - Jamie McFarlane
 - Erica Ridley
- Discount Program Chair: Emilie Richards
- Volunteer Jobs (Just One Thing) Coordinator: Lois Lavrisa

Central Coordinator

Novelists, Inc. c/o Terese Ramin

P.O. Box 54, Hartland MI 48353

admin@ninc.com

Address changes may be made on the website.

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